

Summer 2021

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Y Dang Nhu Tran

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Recommended Citation

Tran, Y Dang Nhu, "Linguistic Discrimination in Higher Education in Vietnam" (2021). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 1133.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.1164>

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Linguistic Discrimination in Higher Education in Vietnam

by

Y Dang Nhu Tran

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

Applied Linguistics

Thesis Adviser

Kimberley Brown

Portland State University

2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Kimberley Brown, for keeping me accountable and giving insightful feedback throughout the study to boost my thinking and paper quality. Despite this challenging period, you have allowed me to learn, grow and nurture my span of knowledge to open many great opportunities in the future.

I would like to also thank my three informants, Nick, PDT & Dieu, for being part of this study. Without your help and generosity, I would not have been granted a chance to conduct this research successfully. You have given your unconditional support by promptly responding to my emails and showing up to our scheduled interviews despite the time zones & technology difficulties. You all have also provided me with a vast amount of information, which has given me more resources to dive deeper into the discussing problem.

I want to acknowledge all of the authors from the readings in the Reference section. Their findings play an integral part in the paper. It builds up the credibility of my results and also expands my understanding of the issue.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my oldest brother, Nguyen Tran, for his valuable guidance throughout the study. Thank you for having my back! I am forever in your debt.

ABSTRACT

Prof. John Baugh has remarked that “this greater linguistic unity will help us all as we move toward the future” (Baugh, 2019). This qualitative research paper addresses the causes of linguistic discrimination and the impacts on current college students in Vietnam via three students from different regions (North, Central, and South) at one university. The paper examines linguistic discrimination and how political and linguistic identity have shaped behavior and social interaction on the part of three young Vietnamese intellectuals. The literature examines a brief history of Vietnamese language and culture, research paradigms in linguistic discrimination, and learning culture.

Keywords: linguistic discrimination, college students, globalization, higher education, Vietnamese dialects, case studies

Introduction

Linguistic discrimination occurs across the globe. Vietnam is not an exception simply because it has more than one dialect within a language. The conflicts arise when one judges an individual (out-group member) based on their voice and discriminates against them (as cited in Ball et al., 2005, pp. 155-166). This issue is frequently mentioned in the newspaper from local news (Cao & Le, 2005, pp.153-187); however, most people are not aware of it but view it as a normal conflict among different ethnicities and not a severe problem.

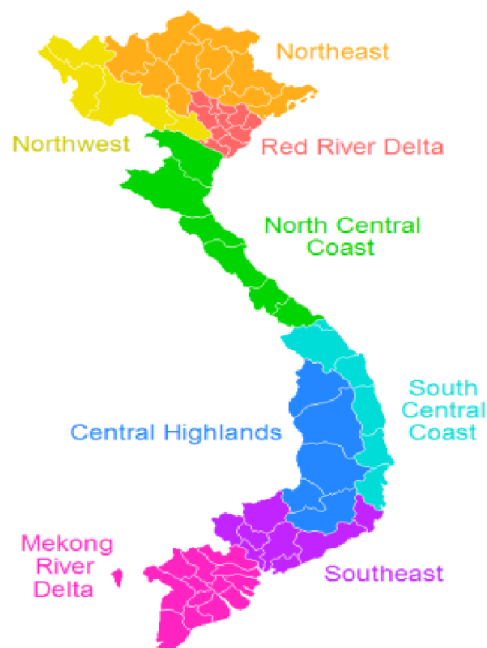


Figure 1.1: Regional Map of Vietnam. Source: The General Statistics Office of Vietnam

As a researcher who grew up in Vietnam, this issue is important because I want to expand my knowledge and give insightful exploration to my communities, especially the Ministry of Education and Training. This issue has been underexplored in Vietnam, and this qualitative study may contribute to a richer understanding of the context in Vietnam.

I anticipate that linguistic discrimination negatively impacts college students' experience. I intend to explore the degree to which linguistic discrimination occurs in higher education in Vietnam via a multiple case study of three students at one university. The case study was conducted with Nick, PDT, and Dieu, three undergraduates, who described their experiences with linguistic discrimination [note—these names are all pseudonyms].

Literature Review

This literature review will examine a brief history of language and culture in Vietnam, research paradigm in linguistic discrimination, and learning culture. These three areas are significant factors in approaching the topic objectively and accurately under the Vietnamese educational context.

The World's Major Languages (2009), states that traditional Vietnamese society includes 4 classes, which are scholars, craftsmen, farmers, and merchants. Each class maintains its own dialect, the same in vocabulary and grammar (Comrie, 2009). It started with social classes and not within different regions. To answer the question of why there are distinct differences between the three regions, Nguyen et al. said: "The history of Vietnamese dialects has recently involved large-scale migrations and effects of nationwide communication and travel" (as cited in Comrie, 2009, p. 680). The dialects are distinct and very easy to recognize because of the tonal contour direction and height. The Northern and Southern dialects have a common grammar and vocabulary and are both considered the standard dialect. This acrolectal variety is used on television and radio broadcasts to preserve purity and clarity (Brunelle, 2009). The central dialect is distinct from others and less valued.

Vietnamese is a well-known language and spoken widely by more than 89 million people across the nation (Pham & McLeod, 2016). The language has gone through a long process of changes and modifications to get to where it currently is, as show in Figure 1.2 below.

The history of Vietnamese has been sketched by Maspéro as follows:

- (1) Pre-Vietnamese, common to Vietnamese and Mường before their separation;
- (2) Proto-Vietnamese, before the formation of Sino-Vietnamese;
- (3) Archaic Vietnamese, characterised by the individualisation of Sino-Vietnamese (towards the tenth century);
- (4) Ancient Vietnamese, represented by the Chinese–Vietnamese glossary *Hua-yi Yi-yu* (sixteenth century);
- (5) Middle Vietnamese of the Vietnamese–Portuguese–Latin dictionary of Alexandre de Rhodes (seventeenth century); and
- (6) Modern Vietnamese, beginning in the nineteenth century.

Figure 1.2: Vietnamese's history timeline. Source: Comrie, 2009

Certainly, during Chinese, French, and U.S colonization, the speaking and writing system has been influenced, and there is no unity among language users. There were migrations as people moved based on their beliefs (Baumgarten & Du Bois, 2019). Let's take the Vietnam Civil War as an example: the country was divided into two distinct regions, North and South. People who followed Ho Chi Minh moved to the North, and the rest who followed Ngo Dinh Diem moved to the South. Therefore, there is now an assortment of people with different backgrounds and spoken dialects. This affects the development of dialects and their distribution. People's diverse backgrounds influence the nuance of the Vietnamese language. The phonological dimensions of the three varieties are described on the next page.

Table IV. Vietnamese consonants and semivowels in Standard Vietnamese and across three dialects.

Grapheme(s)	Standard Vietnamese	Northern dialect	Central dialect	Southern dialect
<i>Initial consonants</i>				
p	/p/	/p/	/p/	/b/
b	/b/	/b/	/b/	/b/
th	/tʰ/	/tʰ/	/tʰ/	/tʰ/
t	/t/	/t/	/t/	/t/
đ	/d/	/d/	/d/	/d/
tr	/t/	/c/	/t/	/t/
ch	/c/	/c/	/c/	/c/
c	/k/	/k/	/k/	/k/
k	/k/	/k/	/k/	/k/
q	/k/	/k/	/k/	/w/
—	/ʔ/	/ʔ/	/ʔ/	—
m	/m/	/m/	/m/	/m/
n	/n/	/n/	/n/	/n/
nh	/ɲ/	/ɲ/	/ɲ/	/ɲ/
ng	/ŋ/	/ŋ/	/ŋ/	/ŋ/
ngh	/ŋ/	/ŋ/	/ŋ/	/ŋ/
ph	/f/	/f/	/f/	/f/
v	/v/	/v/	/v/	/j/
x	/s/	/s/	/s/	/s/
s	/s/	/s/	/s/	/s/
d	/z/	/z/	/z/	/j/
gi	/z/	/z/	/z/	/j/
r	/z/	/z/, /ʀ/	/z/	/z/, /j/, /z/, /x/, /ʃ/
kh	/x/	/x/	/x/	/x/
g	/ɣ/	/ɣ/	/ɣ/	/ɣ/
gh	/ɣ/	/ɣ/	/ɣ/	/ɣ/
h	/h/	/h/	/h/	/h/, /w/
l	/l/	/l/	/l/	/l/
Total	23	20	23	21
<i>Initial semivowel</i>				
u	/w/	/w/	/w/	Omission, /w/
o	/w/	/w/	/w/	Omission, /w/
<i>Final consonants</i>				
-p	/-p/	/-p/	/-p/	/-p/
-t	/-t/	/-t/	/-t/	/-t/, /-k/
-c	/-k/	/-k/, /-kʰ/	/-k/, /-kʰ/	/-k/, /-kʰ/
-ch	/-c/	/-c/	/-c/	/-t/
-m	/-m/	/-m/	/-m/	/-m/
-n	/-n/	/-n/	/-n/	/-n/, /-ŋ/
-nh	/-ɲ/	/-ɲ/	/-ɲ/	/-n/
-ng	/-ŋ/	/-ŋ/, /-ŋᵐ/	/-ŋ/, /-ŋᵐ/	/-ŋ/, /-ŋᵐ/
Total	6	10	10	8
<i>Final semivowel</i>				
-i	/-j/	/-j/	/-j/	/-j/
-y	/-j/	/-j/	/-j/	/-j/
-u	/-w/	/-w/	/-w/	/-w/
-o	/-w/	/-w/	/-w/	/-w/
Total	2	2	2	2

Shading indicates that the consonants and semivowels are different from Standard Vietnamese.

Figure 1.3: Vietnamese consonants and semivowels. Source: Ben Pham and Sharyne McLeod, 2016

Table V. Vietnamese vowels in Standard Vietnamese and three dialects.

Grapheme(s)	Standard Vietnamese	Northern dialect	Central dialect	Southern dialect
i	/i/	/i/	/i/	/i/
y	/i/	/i/	/i/	/i/
ê	/e/	/e/	/e/	/e/, /ɛ/
e	/ɛ/	/ɛ/	/ɛ/	/ɛ/
ư	/u/	/u/	/u/	/u/
u	/u/	/u/	/u/	/u/
ô	/o/	/o/	/o/	/o/
o	/ɔ/	/ɔ/	/ɔ/	/ɔ/
ơ	/ɤ/	/ɤ/	/ɤ/	/ɤ/
a	/a/ or /ɑ/	/a/ or /ɑ/	/a/ or /ɑ/ and /ɔ/	/a/ or /ɑ/
â	/ɤ̃/	/ɤ̃/	/ɤ̃/	/ɤ̃/
ã, a	/ɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/
a	/ɛ̃/	/ɛ̃/	/ɛ̃/	/ɔ̃/
o	/ɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/
iê	/ie/	/ie/	/ie/	/i/
yê	/ie/	/ie/	/ie/	/i/
ia	/ie/	/ie/	/ie/	/ie/
ya	/ie/	/ie/	/ie/	/ie/
uô	/uo/	/uo/	/uo/	/u/
ua	/uo/	/uo/	/uo/	/uo/
ươ	/urɤ/	/urɤ/	/urɤ/	/urɤ/
ura	/urɤ/	/urɤ/	/urɤ/	/urɤ/

Shading indicates that the vowels are different from Standard Vietnamese.

Figure 1.4: Vietnamese vowels. Source: Ben Pham and Sharyne McLeod, 2016

In *Political and Linguistic Identities in an Ethnic Conflict*, Smirnova and Llieve (2016) conducted research in Ukraine. They pointed out that language acts as a marker in social discrimination and religion, race, and gender. They argued that the components that trigger ethnolinguistic conflicts are linguistic identity (perception toward in-group and out-group) and political identity (attitudes toward relevant political groups). The authors have brought up the same point as John Baugh (2019), which is "In the context of ethnic conflict, as the proverbial biblical Shibboleth story tells us, language can easily become a key in-group/out-group marker, triggering hostility toward out-groups and/ or solidarity within-groups" (Smirnova & Llieve, 2016, p.212). We see then that political views are associated with language ideology. Evaluators of speakers who favor a specific political group will likewise pass judgment on more well-objective speakers who utilize the language related to this group (Smirnova & Llieve, 2016, p.213). Lippi Green (2011) stated that: "Ideology is indeed most powerful when it is least visible; the invisibility of ideology also makes it much easier to propagate in a classroom" (p.79). With the evidence above, linguistic identity and political identity, ethnic conflict acts as the root problem of social discrimination and leads to human suffering. People have different perceptions toward the in-group and out-group, which cause segregation. Gradually, they determine what is standard and non-standard language and eliminate those who have an undesired dialect.

Connecting this with Cortazzi and Jin's (1996) study on the culture of learning in a China classroom context gives a better understanding of what it means to be a good student/teacher and what they expect from each other. The authors reported: "In China, from kindergarten and primary school children are strictly taught to be obedient and obey orders and rules. They are not taught to develop their own unique personalities and bring out strange questions" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p.18). Being relatively influenced by Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism,

students in Vietnam are taught to comply with teachers' orders and curriculum. It will be interesting to see if this is a dimension that comes up in my research.

Reviewing the literature directs back to the question: What are the causes and impacts of linguistic discrimination on current Vietnamese college students? Three selected informants based on their birthplace, social status, and speaking dialects were interviewed to explore the degree to which linguistic discrimination occurs at the university level in Vietnam.

Methodology

Procedures

Three informants were recruited after the researcher received IRB permission at the beginning of January. I contacted my relative, Nguyen Tran, to introduce me to participants who could meet my criteria, such as hometown, social status, and speaking dialect. The informants provided their email address for contact through the gatekeeper and agreed to learn about the research. An initial email was sent to each participant with informed consent in Vietnamese & English and a Google Form to ask for their availability. In addition to the written consent, I also acquired verbal consent in each of our first meetings. This guaranteed that my informants truly understood the nature of this study. After compiling the informants' availability, I sought the agreement from all three to ensure we agreed to a consistent time meeting to satisfy both time zones. The meetings started with a casual conversation and officially dived into the interview with a reminder of recording the meeting, changing their name to pseudonym, and their preference to turn on/off their camera. Before the interview, I tested out the guiding questions in pilot form (mental rehearsal). The guiding questions were then scripted to help guide the interviewee when needed. Appendix One lists these questions. Six meetings were conducted, two for each informant, that lasted one hour on average. A Zoom link was sent via email for the

informants one week before the meeting. All meetings were recorded so data could be coded later. After each interview, the researcher spent 1-2 hours writing down immediate field notes. It took at least three days to listen to an hour-long interview recording and transcribe it. For the meetings conducted in Vietnamese, I translated the quotations, which I wanted to highlight. Once the transcribing process was done, the transcript was coded to find emergent themes. As explained by Given (2008), the author wrote: “Emergent themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the lifeworlds of research participants through the process of coding” (p.2). I highlighted the quotes that had common ideas between the three informants. After observing the pattern, the highlighted quotes were placed in different categories (themes), and any unrelated details, such as background and study’s intention, were set aside. The chart on pages 14-16 is the compilation of the results.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Because of the qualitative nature of this study, typical criteria of reliability and validity will not be used. Instead, Lincoln and Guba’s trustworthiness and authenticity criteria will be used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Before my informants and I started the interview, I ensured that my informants understood their rights as participants. Knowing my educational institution (PSU), adviser, and the IRB committee helped reassure the informants that the research was conducted under supervision. I also ensured that I spent enough time getting to know the participants and conducting the interviews as if we were having a casual conversation instead of an interrogation. Building trust and rapport with the participants gives informants a safe and friendly environment to freely express their opinions. While I was neutral throughout the study, I believe that I have met the fairness criteria.

All three informants are college students in a well-known university, which adds to the credibility of their knowledge. Even though three informants do not seem bothered linguistic discrimination, they all provided rich details regarding the issue with solid backup evidence through their definitions and beliefs.

The following section describes my three informants.

Subjects

Nick: As a person from Nha Trang in the central part of Vietnam, he considers himself as “a child of the ocean, a phrase often used to describe seaside residents.” Nick got a chance to study abroad, specifically in Texas for high school, which helped boost his English skills and a unique mindset. He came back to Vietnam for higher education and a long-term career. He has been living in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) for two years now and hopes to find a stable job with his degree in Economic Finance.

PDT: PDT is originally from Hai Phong, one of the biggest cities in Vietnam. It is in the North and not far from the capital. PDT recently graduated and moved back to his hometown; he also mentioned that he is hoping to find a stable job in Southern Vietnam and develop his career permanently there. Convincing his family to migrate to the South in the future is also what he is hoping to pursue.

Dieu: Dieu was born and grew up in Ho Chi Minh City (Southern Vietnam). Her parents are originally from Hue, a major city in central Vietnam. She occasionally visits her extended family. Because of that, she has picked up a little bit of the central dialect. However, she can only communicate for primary conversation.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One relates to the accuracy of both transcribing and translating. While the transcripts are accurate for everything I could hear clearly, I was unsure because of the sound. In terms of translating from Vietnamese to English, sometimes I was not confident that as a researcher, I captured all the nuances presented in Vietnamese with my English translation. One relates to the audio quality, which produced some gaps throughout the recording. The omitted sounds caused by the dialect led to some challenges when listening again and transcribing. Additionally, the internet went down in part of my second interviews with two informants. While I had a complete audio recording, the lack of video meant there were dimensions of the interview that I could not track. Additionally, because this study is limited to 3 three informants at one institution, it is not possible to generalize from this.

Results

Figure 2.1: Emergent themes and commonalities – Results of the first interview

	Declared sources of information about linguistic discrimination	Background	Friends	Family	Observations regarding each dialect	Discrimination experiences	Participants' opinions toward language prejudice/discrimination
Informant 1 - PDT (Northern)	Social Media	International Business	Start with Northern friends and gradually expand social integrations	Parent's origin: Northern (Hai Phong)	<p>Northern: strong accent, considered as “standard” as it uses on national news, conferences, and for educational purposes.</p> <p>Easily caused misunderstanding because of intonation</p> <p>Central: not familiar</p> <p>Southern: lisp, amiable, easygoing, relevant to agriculture</p>	None, however, does notice other colleagues mimicking and joking with harmless intention	<p>Mostly between the North and South</p> <p>Ethnolinguistic conflict that could be the consequence of the war</p>

Linguistic Discrimination in Higher Education in Vietnam

Informant 2 - Nick (Central)	Social Media and friends	Finance	Diverse friend groups	<p>Parent's origin: Central (Nha Trang)</p> <p>Nick moved to the South for only 2 years - Purposes: school and job market</p>	<p>Northern: Strong accent and unpredictable intention. Almost feels like mocking.</p> <p>Central: split in half The upper half adopts a Northern accent and opposite.</p> <p>Southern: friendly, caring, optimistic to a certain extent, farmers</p>	<p>Yes, being treated differently at the local stores in the North</p> <p>does notice other colleagues mimicking and joking with harmless intention</p>	<p>Mostly between the North and South</p> <p>Read in newspapers</p>
Informant 3 - Dieu (Southern)	Relatives' experience	International Business	Diverse friend groups	<p>Parent's origin: Central (Hue)</p> <p>Dieu can understand and communicate in Central dialect for primary conversation with a mild accent</p>	<p>Northern: "standard"</p> <p>Central: distinguishable</p> <p>Southern: easy to perceive compared to the other two</p>	<p>Yes, being treated differently by the irritated feelings from the locals</p> <p>Reasons: Locals cannot understand, and also others cannot understand it the first time, as the results, they are being asked to repeat many times.</p>	<p>Mostly between the North and South</p> <p>Read on the newspapers</p>

Figure 2.2: Emergent themes and commonalities – Results of the second interview

	Personal experience	Linguistic discrimination's impacts in college setting and/or outside	How to prevent	Strategies to acknowledge this topic	How Covid-19 impacts	Typical stereotypes about your own dialects
PDT	<p>Experienced difficulty in perceiving the locals from the South</p> <p>Sometimes mocks and teases with cousins regarding their dialect</p> <p>Taxi driver's negative attitude toward Northern people</p>	<p>No mentioned impacts during college.</p> <p>Linguistic discrimination is not significant outside of college environment since most young people nowadays view this problem as a social conflict</p>	<p>This issue is unchangeable, however, youngsters nowadays and the next generation will help reduce the complexity if this problem</p>	<p>Bring this topic up on social media and news to spread the words</p>	<p>Example of the current outbreak from a Northern province. It has led to a bad role model. Not physical attack, but depreciate</p>	<p>Occasionally brutal, somewhat serious and literary.</p> <p>Sometimes just using the word only used in Hai Phong, simple slang. Can easily recognize the original region.</p> <p>Tone is softer compared to other nearby provinces</p>
Nick	<p>Fascinated by the variety of dialects, especially with Central dialects. He usually takes after someone's accent unconsciously. Enjoys Northern part jokes</p>	<p>Sustainable, it does slightly affect how people interact with the one</p>	<p>Can cause some controversy if bring this topic into college setting</p> <p>Approach education areas</p> <p>Write propaganda</p>	<p>Confront others and raise people's awareness</p>	<p>The pandemic is worsening the issue. People started to become paranoid and isolated from the outbreak provinces.</p>	<p>Easy-going, open to any kind of temptation</p>

Dieu	<p>Her uncle and acquaintance's speaking speed is slower and wordier than Northern people.</p> <p>On the other hand, in-group members can understand easily</p> <p>Observe the same when she works with a group that is from Da nang</p> <p>Witness more than experiencing it herself</p>	<p>Vietnam also acknowledges this problem and expect to come up some solutions to solve this problem. As a result, not truly impact college students.</p> <p>Primarily, college students represent the intellectual group in the society, which gives a different lens to the problem</p> <p>Better awareness compared to others</p>	<p>Bring up to media. VTV channel, they tend to adjust their content to approach youngsters better. Even national news channels might be hard to bring up this issue; however, it is not too difficult to raise awareness on a large scale.</p>	<p>Need to find a solution to manage media better.</p> <p>Should teach this to children at the early age</p>	<p>Tend to isolate people who are from different regions, especially when they speak other dialects</p>	<p>Can't predict her impression via tone of voice</p>
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Nick

Nick and I met via Zoom three times throughout study. We communicated by email initially and studied the consent carefully in our first meeting. Nick chose English as his preferred language, agreed to all conditions, and acknowledged his rights as a participant. During our interviews, he seemed to lean forward to the screen when answering the questions and fixed the technology glitches as fast as possible to proceed to the discussion. The questions were sent to him before the meetings; Nick always read through the questions in advance and said some things that were thought-provoking. To him, linguistic discrimination exists in Vietnam; however, it acts as an invisible issue with not much attention.

After Nick finished high school in the U.S, he decided to pursue his college degree back home. Comparing universities in Nha Trang (his hometown) to schools in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) led him to move to the South. According to *Vietnam Briefing News*, they stated that "HCMC is in many ways a 'promised land,' attracting immigrants from across Vietnam to pursue economic fortune. While most people in HCMC are ethnic Vietnamese, the city is also known for cultural diversity." According to Nick, the transitions between countries and regions have allowed him to grow and nurture his target lifestyle. The transition time has allowed Nick to network with many colleagues across the country. Some are from the upper North, while others are from Hue, Hoi An, and HCMC. With a diverse friend group, Nick said he could somewhat recognize a person's background by the sound of their voice. It is easy for him to locate which part of the country they are from; however, not the exact name of the city indeed. Nick's perception of regional accents is about the nuances of culture & identity. He explains:

I've thought hard about this question. And I think that it's, um, to have, you know, to have an accent. It's about, um, letting others know your culture. It's, it's, uh, it's to say that, uh, accent is a, is a part of culture, right. And it's also a very big part of your identity. So it

doesn't really tell you anything more than that besides, you know, uh. I'm from the Northern part, or I'm from the north of the central part, but yeah, you, you definitely tell them, um, what kind of culture you are.

Nick described very clearly that there are differences between communication patterns between the North and the South:

... I'm talking more about, uh, how you normally communicate Northern. Uh, so for the people from the North, they have quite, uh, you know, there is a difference in how you communicate, um, between the North and the South. So, I would say that this is more of a personal, um, opinion, but, yeah, like for, for the people from the North, they're a little bit more discreet. Like they, they speak in a more, um, I wouldn't say elegant fashion, but, um, yeah, they, that the communication is more discreet and for the South, it's, it's more, you know, open, straightforward, not that the, not that other region is not straight and open.

For his own dialect, he said that the Central part splits into parts, and place where he has lived pick up the Southern accent. Because of this reason, Nick can easily adapt into new environment in HCMC. Nick took time to know places nearby instead of adjusting his dialect. In Table 1.1, it shows that the vowels and consonants are slightly different from the standard language. However, what makes it distinct from others is the tone and pitch. He walked me through the geographical separation by listing the cities and provinces. Nick said: “Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh belong to North-Central; Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue belong to Mid-Central; and Da Nang, Phu Yen, Nha Trang belong to South-Central.” He laughed a bit when he was explaining as a lot of people nowadays still misunderstand about these facts.

As a Third Culture Kid, who had an international lifestyle and frequently relocated, Nick seems to have different ideas towards linguistic discrimination than the other two informants. During his time on campus, he often witnessed his colleagues mimicking each other or using other dialects to laugh about, often because of how people interpret a word/phrase. Nick said that most of those occurrences are harmless. He suggested it was not their intention to hurt one's feelings.

Experiencing a poor interaction with an employee during his trip in the North had given Nick a bad impression. He gave more details; it seems he remembers this story as a lesson to learn instead of forming a stereotype about Northern people in general. It was a local convenience store, where he stopped by to grab some items. Obviously, he had to communicate with the cashier on his way out. Right at that moment when the cashier noticed his dialect, they quickly changed their attitude and behavior. He then left the store but was still skeptical about that unusual reaction. Nowadays, Nick rarely encounters these dilemmas nor witnesses any bad outcomes, but rather learns about these stories in the newspaper. He even read about some of the physically abuse because of dialect differences. Despite this, he strongly believes that people have not been aware that their actions could be considered discriminatory.

Besides of Nick's experience off campus, he came back to language policy to explain why they do not have such a policy at his college. He said that:

It's um, um, there is no requirements about what language you speak, but then it's, it's definitely some of it it's, it's definitely one of those, uh, unspoken rule, uh, teachers will, won't be speaking to you in Vietnamese. Um, your friends will, but then you get shushed like right away. So you, you, you would have to speak in English most of the time.

... Um, what I meant was, um, you're not supposed to chat in class anyways. Right.

You're supposed to focus on the teachers. So, you get shushed if you speak in any languages

Nick thinks that English has become the dominant language at his college, which diminishes the chance of communicating in Vietnamese. Forming a habit of comfortably using English on campus is one of his goals for success as a student. Nick has retained Vietnamese in small group settings and during activities outside of class.

PDT

I followed the same procedure by reaching out to PDT through emails first. We went through the consent, and I made sure to answer all his questions before officially conducting the interview. PDT preferred Vietnamese in both interviews. He chose Vietnamese because he stated he felt more comfortable using his first language and also wanted to provide insightful answers with some terminologies (that he might not know in English) related to the topic. Because of the language preference, all his quotes had to be translated to English when transcribing the dialogue.

When we spoke about linguistic discrimination, PDT initially said “I do have some difficulties in learning and adjusting the vocabulary span when I first came to the South, however, living here for 4 years influenced a lot on my speaking dialect, mixed between Northern and Southern.” He spent a few months adapting to life at a new place and connecting with friends at college.

For PDT, it is easy to recognize someone's background based on their voice. He stated that:

It is not difficult to recognize people's background by the sound of their voice as social media is developing strongly and youngsters pick up from it really fast, same for the national TV channels. In some rare cases, it could be hard to recognize when people migrate from other cities, provinces, towns and so on. These people are more likely to have mixed dialects.

PDT expressed his knowledge of the three dialects by giving me the descriptions of each. Southern accent has a soothing & friendly tone and a lisp for some individuals. For PDT, the Central dialect seems a bit challenging to comprehend and speakers appear to have what he terms a "mixed accent". It is technically being separated, and people there are being influenced by the locals they live nearby. Between three dialects, PDT also finds the way of wording is unique. He circled back to describe his own dialect, which is Northern, with excitement by his hand gesture:

I would say Northern dialect sounds more grave, elegant and yet has a stronger tone.

People pronounce it more accurately as it is considered a national language, standard one.

Although there are various new channels across the country, people still watch VTV channels (northern dialect) for the most reliable source.

PDT noticed that there are judgments about the accents, and these accents are not equally valued. He suggested this is more of an issue for those in previous generations and gave the example that he and his best friend, born and raised in the South get along very well. The root problem of discrimination is the remaining of Vietnam Civil War. PDT seemed a little wary before diving into his perception about the war, so he did ask if I would like to hear more about it because it might be complicated and deviate from our main interview focus. He acknowledged

that there might be some bias, but he still wanted to show me what common people think. PDT said:

In my opinion, there is an involvement of the war that leads to discrimination, among others. For example, Northern ... communism force, Southern “Puppet government”. The conflict has caused hatred among people ever since, and through word of mouth, the segregation lasted till our generation.

PDT linked language and politics and suggested language could play a role in how individuals discriminated against others. In spite of migration, he stated that people typically retain much of their dialect when have moved. He observed that people tend to attend to and examine other people’s speech and connect with their political group’s stereotypes about each other. To PDT, the process is like a domino effect.

After two years of college in HCMC, PDT feels attracted to this fast-paced environment and has learned Southern dialect from his relatives and friends. He plans to move to the South permanently and has also convinced his family to come.

Following this discussion, PDT then recalled to an unfortunate event regarding discrimination. He quickly briefed through the stories:

I was in a cab the other day. The driver and I did not speak much to each other, but just a casual greeting when I got in the car. I guess he did not notice my Northern dialect, maybe because my speech is kinda influenced by Southern dialect as well. Then a motorbike cut in front of the car, the driver felt annoyed about it and said “Mấy cái thằng Bắc Kỳ này” (Explanation: Bắc Kỳ as known as Tonkin, is the name of a site to describe the possessed properties back in the Minh Dynasty. Some individuals adopted this phrase

as an offensive term). I was shocked and soon realized that the driver did not know that I am also from the North. That was pretty awkward to me (PDT giggled)

PDT did not dwell on this issue because he believes that young people are less likely to engage in discriminatory judgments. He believes media platforms can play a role in spreading the word and nurturing one's understanding regarding social issues.

Dieu

After agreeing to the conditions in the consent, Dieu and I started the interview. Dieu chose to use Vietnamese as we communicated and also turned off her camera due to bandwidth issues and what she considered an inappropriate background. I went over the informed consent with her verbally during our first interview. We met via Zoom twice. Dieu was first afraid that she might not be a best fit for the study because she has not encountered much linguistic discrimination; but she indicated she has learned more from media and families' experience. To make sure Dieu could comfortably share her thoughts, I tried my best to rephrase and add open-ended questions to guide her through the interviews. Dieu used a soft and friendly voice when she was telling me about her experience and opinions. Whenever we coincidentally spoke at the same time, she paused and let me continue first.

When Dieu was being asked about her perceptions of regional dialects, she gave an adjective to describe each and briefly through her own dialects. Same as Nick, she preferred me to examine her speech from my perspective. She said: "... well, I will just let you tell me your opinion about my speech, whether I have strong or mild accent, tone, pitch and everything." Dieu initially seemed to hesitate when answering questions in the first interview because her answers were quite broad and short. She started to provide more in-depth information in our second interview. Interestingly, Dieu's parents are originally from Hue (central Vietnam), and

her relatives are still based in the central area. She said she can understand and communicate in Central dialect for primary conversation with a mild accent. Because of her ability to speak in Central dialect, she found central is distinguishable and southern dialect is more easily understood. For the Northern dialect, she considered it as the standard dialect. Dieu got a chance to travel back to her hometown quite often; therefore, she shared her experience of being discriminated against with me. She was being treated differently by the irritated feelings from the locals in Central region. It is understandable that people might get irritated when being asked to repeat over again, however, she would not encounter that dilemma in the Southern often compared to the Central area. Dieu considered her responsibility in that negative experience. She additionally provided her reasons to explain why the event occurred (i.e., how strong of the accent, different vocabulary span, speech articulations, etc.). It almost felt that it was just a coincidence to her. She also sometimes witnessed people mimicking others' dialects at her college. In her interview, she indicated to me that no one intentionally seemed to want to harm anyone.

She further clarified that the conflict happens mostly between adults from the North and South; and she has noticed those violence conflict stories in the newspaper. When Dieu described her experience at the university, she commented on diversity. She found that when there has been a diverse student population, there appears to be less discrimination. As the other two informants indicated, students there are more likely to mimic different dialects to tease their friends, with no intention to insult anyone. While Dieu does recognize herself as mimicking her friend, she stated that she never intends to harm her friends. When I asked her more about the discrimination, she talked a little bit about language policy at the university and said there is no policy regarding language. She also added that everyone at school possesses the same access to

resources on campus and receive equal education opportunities. To Dieu, “there are many miniature societies in a large school, and clubs create a mutual culture.” She thinks that those societies represent the group of students who find a common ground, and clubs are the connector which keep the in-groups and out-groups communicating efficiently.

Dieu observed that those issues are starting to become obsolete nowadays as there are many people immigrating to a new land, where they find more opportunities to grow. She found it fascinating to discover her friend's hometown compared to their current dialects. Dieu also talked about how language affects one's personality. She stated:

When you hear a voice, I think automatically in your head you will link to people/acquaintances from other regions with similar voices. And you will assume their personalities will be similar. Comparing the description in the book and real-life experience, I would believe more in the experience because it is closest to reality; the reader might not be up to date.

I have a friend from law university, who is from a rural area in the South. At first everyone treated her normally. But that friend was afraid that people would not respect her because she is not from the big cities so she changed her voice/dialect so that she could gain the respect and then her friends got annoyed and isolated her. I have heard the familiar story quite often. I think a different accent will affect your personality and behavior. It might not fit in a certain environment.

Dieu would prefer her friend to maintain their dialect rather than adjusting to chasing the ideal dialect. She expressed her disappointment that this event occurs frequently, and that people accept to change themselves just to fit in a community drastically.

Discussion

The main purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate three college students' experiences with linguistic discrimination. This part of the study includes a discussion of major findings related to the literature on ethnolinguistic conflicts amongst in-groups and out-groups, school, and social interaction, and what implications may be crucial for use by Vietnam's education departments, regulators, and policymakers.

The section contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions:

Q: What are the causes and impacts of linguistic discrimination on current Vietnamese college students?

If we want to address this question in the simplest way possible, we must go back to the basics of understanding the term discrimination. Cambridge Dictionary defined the term discrimination as “treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their skin color, sex, sexuality, etc.” (“discrimination,” n.d.). My hypothesis suggested that college students in Vietnam have experiences associated with linguistic discrimination at a medium to a great level, impacting their performance and success.

The results of this study give further credibility to the hypothesis based upon social stigma research regarding linguistic discrimination. All three informants grew up in a society that values The Three Teachings, and their families have strong political beliefs. These two elements influence individuals' mindset about a particular province, forming their stereotype to judge others based on their voice and origin of dialect.

My interviews have suggested that the causes of linguistic discrimination in the Vietnamese university environment I examined appear to be social stigma, the Three Teachings, political beliefs, and linguistic identity. It affects group performance in schools and student-student relationships based on economic and social status, biases, rumors stereotyping.

“Stigma is the possession of, or belief that one possesses, some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context” (as cited in Major & O’Brien, 2005, p.395). O’Brien (2005) indicated that the process of forming social stigma correlates with an individual’s financial, political beliefs, and social status. Social stigma often has characteristics such as race, gender, employment, education, and so on. Policymakers in Vietnam have tried their best to eliminate inequality in employment, schooling, and racial profiling. However, many aspects have embedded the mindset of the people. According to a government newspaper issue, “Thanh Nien,” Ho Chi Minh city contributed 26.6% of national income, making Ho Chi Minh city the central economics system and the largest compared to other provinces (Dang, 2019). Discrimination and social stigma induce in-group favoritism by labeling negative traits to the out-group members (Stangor, 2021) and this may account for what I encountered in my informants’ narratives. In Vietnam, in terms of geography, Southern Vietnam has an abundance of natural resources (Turley, n.d.). The Vietnam Civil War has divided North and South for a long time, which results in an uneven development progression between the two regions (Pelley, 2020). With this evidence above, they led to discrimination and stigmatization in Vietnam. Repeated research that supports this study is coming from John Baugh. His research has revealed linguistic prejudice through his phone experiment in the State regarding unequal access to housing. He stated that “if you don’t recognize the caller, you will draw demographic inferences in a discriminatory way” (John Baugh, 2018). The discussion is

two-fold: (a) the influence of globalization on linguistic discrimination and (b) how political and linguistics identity shape behavior and social interaction on young Vietnamese intellectuals.

Some factors relate primarily to more minor scales like the classroom, some to the social entities, and some to the migration of families. All the factors above contribute to an environment where linguistic discrimination is plausible and continues to take place even at a low degree currently.

Interpretation of the Findings

Three of my informants are young intellectuals coming from one college but with different backgrounds and birthplaces. The two themes below were noteworthy in extinguishing linguistic discrimination in higher education and a social environment. These themes have an in-depth dimension to them, which could imply Vietnamese education in the future. Each theme is depicted in detail in the following section.

The Influence of Globalization on Linguistic Discrimination

My first informant Nick had a unique background compared to two other informants. As this study confirmed, Nick found a gray area between cultures and has excellent tolerance to culture shock and differences. Polluck and Van Reken's findings reveal that Third Culture Kids develop relationships with all the cultures while not having full possession in any (as cited in Cockburn, 2002, p.477). My second informant PDT also shares similar traits and characteristics of Nick, where he grew up in a different culture outside of his parents' culture throughout his development stage.

The Three Teachings are Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are the foundations that manifest belief and action in most countries in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam (Bethrong,

2014). Dieu, in this study, agreed that children were taught to listen to elders since they live longer, which is wiser according to her parents and educators, giving them a cognitive dissonance when their behaviors have been dictated, or some would describe it as scripted. Historically, the perception also included that doing what's been told by your parents, learning from Taoism and Confucianism's teachings, is a way of displaying respect and was the norm of society, once was the only way considered to be a functional society (Bethrong, 2014).

As I outlined above, the images and content coming from social media and media often portray villains by presenting opposing characteristics. In addition, the Three Teaching has contributed to the creditability of regional slang and jokes. When children grow up around non-practical and non-academic teachings and see it as a norm, the mindset will to some extent, be negatively affected by their perception of people from elsewhere.

These results have fascinating implications concerning the issue of self-identity. When people such as Nick or PDT move to other countries or places, they have different experiences with new people in new settings; they've chosen to align themselves with community members and suggest that they want to belong. The two individuals I've spoken with related their desire to fit in and do anything necessary not to be discriminated against. While living in the U.S. for a short period, Nick had various experiences with diversity. When he returned to Vietnam, his social circle seemed to mix and match people from different places and provinces, such as Hue, Hanoi, etc. From the social identity theory (as cited in Jackson, 2014, p.146), Nick has shown an appreciation of his accent instead of denying it since he saw his accent as a contribution and not a burden. He sees accents or dialects as a trait and will not determine any individuals. Moreover, his understanding of intercultural communication from his study overseas has increased and

opened more opportunities for him while living in the South. His increase in cultural-difference awareness may lessen barriers in communication, which will remove some degree of linguistic discrimination (Hofstede, 2011).

Globalization encourages countries to meet the standard internationally to become global players, including access to more information and knowledge. Globalization also enhances intercultural communication knowledge, which lessens social stigmatism and discrimination by increasing diversity. College students benefit significantly from the vast resource that meets the global standard, and cultural prejudices stemming from social stigma will gradually blend with the global development trend.

Political and Linguistic Identity Shape Behavior and Social Interaction

My second and third informants, PDT and Dieu, grew up with a stronger family tradition than the first informant in terms of political beliefs. Despite their background differences, the two informants mentioned, PDT and Dieu, had experienced family influences at some levels depending on their parents' political beliefs. Previous and commonly researched topics from Smirnova and Llieve (2016) suggest that political identity plays a role in determining people's attitudes toward others and creates segregation.

The results of this study would agree with the literature regarding the in-group and out-group ethnolinguistic conflicts becoming a factor of segregation. Smirnova and Llieve (2016) suggested that a language is a powerful tool for social discrimination. Gillon (2016) mentioned that people tend to immediately judge others by their accent, then tone down their judgments as more information is given. In pop culture, the way they portray villains or bad guy figures is more likely to speak with a foreign accent which refers to a specific stereotype (as cited in

Smirnova & Llieve, 2016). In this study, two informants Dieu and PDT, indicate their likelihood of having a barrier toward the out-group since their knowledge and information was fed by the elders from their family or the community they are currently living in. In contrast, those historical or cultural references may or may not be accurate but seem to involve biases depending on an individual's political beliefs. This finding indicates that ethnolinguistic conflicts indirectly occur and are passively rooted throughout families from generation to generation.

PDT self-identified the stereotypes toward his dialect by saying that “Northern has a strong accent, considered as ‘standard’ as it uses on national news, conferences, and for

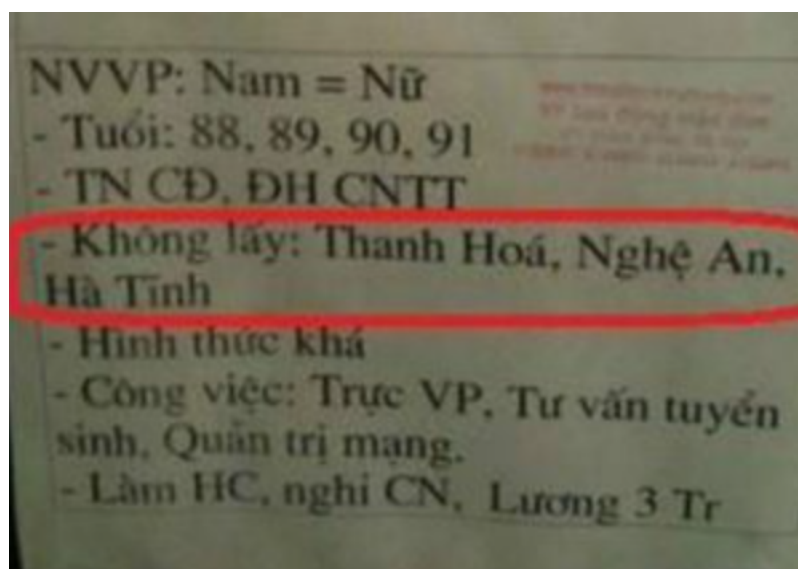


Figure 2.3 Hiring criteria. Source: Insidernews24, 2021

educational purposes.” PDT’s linguistic stereotypes are based on information that has no credibility and established legal science. This information is constantly fed information through social media, or the slang or said is regional. This control to the period of the

social and between the races. Specifically, a blog article from insidernews24.com (2021) offers photo evidence of a hiring post with criteria specifically not to hire people from Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh (Central region) (Figure 2.3). For students, it will affect their self-esteem and performance. The stigma is more transparent when students work and study in industries where teamwork dominates the curriculum.

To extend the study onto the topic of impacts of social identity in respect of increasing social status, further studies should investigate the history and mentality of Vietnamese intellectuals throughout the course of pre-civil war before 1945 and post-civil war in 1975 to understand the effects of political and economic status impacts on social bias such as linguistic discrimination.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this case study provide evidence of linguistic discrimination in higher education and help clarify the bigger picture of this rising phenomenon. Results reveal variation in my informants' responses to their experiences of linguistic discrimination and their personal beliefs about it. One of the three informants, a Third Culture Kid, had very different thoughts of linguistic discrimination than two other informants; those with pre-existing exposure to diversity have more tolerance and acceptance to differences, whereas people with minimal travel experience may have a skeptical mindset in a biased way.

Yet, this issue causes various effects based on one's interpretation and perception toward linguistic discrimination in the education setting. Even though everyone has a unique linguistic heritage, people tend to go beyond judging one based on their voice to make themselves better than everyone else (Gillon, 2016). College students in Vietnam are not exposed much to the interpretation of their dialect, which exhibits a vague understanding of the consequences in the long run.

From multiple points of view, language discrimination stays hidden despite playing an essential role in developing a nation. For instance, it is allowed at some institutions to judge students by the way they talk and compose. There is room for language policy development at

my informants' university because students utilize English full-time. The ideal standard stereotype from a different group of students becomes out of university's awareness.

To become a successful global player, it is crucial for Vietnam to also dig deeper into linguistic aspects, especially education. In a recent article from Lindgaard on LinkedIn, the author suggested that "This makes sense - without healthy and well-educated citizens, adequate infrastructure, effective legal systems and peace, and tolerance, economies cannot thrive." Linguistic discrimination in Vietnam has not emerged as a dominant issue in the press and through my brief exploration. However, exploring this issue further may improve students' learning quality & performance and the country's development according to Hao (2021), an author from Yale University reported in his recent article entitled "YGDP members speak about linguistic prejudice."

Future research

In the future, this research may act as a door to open further research regarding linguistic discrimination, notably higher education in Vietnam. In addition, this research could be built into my curriculum if teaching at the university level.

This brief assessment of the experiences of three individuals could be extended to survey-style research bringing in more students from more institutions and settings. Additionally, this study could be replicated in government or administrative offices to see if similar attitudes are shown. For Vietnam to move forward in its development, there is little to no room for any dimension of linguistic discrimination at the policy level and the implementation level.

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Appendix One

Guiding Questions

Developed by Newey Tran

PSU HUMAN RESEARCH-
PROTECTION PROGRAM
HRRP# 217179-18

1. Can you tell a person's background by the sound of their voice? When you hear someone speaking, can you place their accent geographically?
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2. What does it mean to have a Northern accent, Central accent, or Southern accent?
3. Have you noticed judgments about the accents? Are these accents equally valued?
4. As a college student, describe your own experience encountering others regarding regional dialect differences (for example, how you communicate with your colleague and being treated, the sense of belonging, etc.)
5. Has your institution ever presented policies related to the language of students?
6. Have you ever experienced discrimination based on your accent?

Guiding questions #2

Developed by Newey Tran

1. Tell me more about your experiences interacting with different accents.
2. Why did you choose your current college? What makes it different from the others, especially public universities
3. What degree do you think linguistic discrimination impact college students (and people in general) in Vietnam?
4. How can linguistic discrimination be prevented?
5. What are some ways that people can start to recognize whether or not they are committing acts of linguistic racism?
6. How has the pandemic worsened the issue? (Some informants mentioned new announcers)
7. What is the typical stereotype about your accent?